

## **Fixing You** by [newanda.dps](#)

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**Summary:** Claire is an eager, bright new student entering her junior year at Hawkins High School. After her naivety leads her to fall for the school bully, she finds herself lost in his world. Will she be able to regain her own strength when Hawkins falls under attack? Billy/OC

# 1. Chapter 1

**Disclaimer:** I do not own Stranger Things or any of the characters created by the show.

**My OC is Claire Owens.**

To summarize where this plotline is going without giving everything away (and also to make sure you don't get the wrong impression of the story before it begins), the sci-fi fighting and world-saving aspect of the Stranger Things series *does* come into play eventually, but not for some time. A good part of the beginning of this story follows the development of Billy and Claire's relationship. Therefore, the storylines will not exactly match up but they do merge at some point. And it will kick ass.

Until then... Yes, Billy *is* straight in this story. And he *is* abusive.

**\*\*\*Super trigger warning.** It gets real, and pretty dark.

**ALSO...** this chapter is super short because I would like to see some sort of response before I continue. My chapters will typically be between 2000-4000 words.

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Claire was nervous and excited. While she was sad to leave her friends in her hometown of Ann Arbor, MI, she knew how excited her father was to live in a town with family again. After he received an opportunity to get in on the ground floor of his brother's construction company, he had first talked to Claire's mother, and then they had all sat down and talked about the move together. What they would be excited about, what they would be worried about, if they were okay with the idea of moving, or if it made them angry. Claire's parents imagined she may be resistant to move for her junior year of high school, but after her best friend since junior high had announced that she was moving, as well, the decision was not as difficult. Claire could tell how excited her parents were about this new opportunity, though they were trying not to pressure her into agreeing with the move just because of them. Ultimately, though, Claire was so very appreciative of the fact that she had the kind of relationship with

them that she had. They cared about her, and loved her, and she would be okay. It didn't take much for her to make friends, anyways, and she would write her friends back in Michigan. She was sure she'd have just as great of an experience in Hawkins than at her previous school.

She had been captain of the soccer team, was on the pep squad, yearbook committee, national honor society, and a few more. She loved being social and active. She maintained above average grades and was proud of it. Yes, some of the senior cheerleaders at her school said she was lame, nerdy, a geek, whatever. But usually, upon meeting her, any person would eventually come to like Claire. She was kind, and considerate, and unbelievably positive. She liked wearing yellow and orange clothing with her bright white sneakers, and often sported large bows in her thick, wavy hair. She liked smiling.

Her dad dropped her off in the parking lot on her first day, smiling and waving goodbye. She smiled back, carrying her small stack of textbooks to the sidewalk and starting towards the school. She looked around, taking in the greetings between friends who hadn't seen each other over the summer. Her dark, somewhat messy pony tail blew in the breeze, and she smiled. This would be a good year.

Just as she thought this, she heard an incredibly loud engine rev behind her, and a screeching noise as a car pulled *way* too quickly into the parking lot. She could hear a couple of disgruntled murmurs coming from some nearby students. Curious, she glanced across the lot to see who was causing the commotion. He stepped out of the vehicle, not appearing to be holding a back pack or any school supplies at all. He was smoking a cigarette and had long light brown hair. *He's actually quite handsome*, she thought briefly as she took in his soft facial features. Judging by his appearance, he likely wouldn't want to have anything to do with her. They were probably exactly opposite, very unlikely to be acquaintances.

Her thoughts were interrupted as the two of them made eye contact. Her heart skipped a beat when he smiled crookedly at her, showing perfectly white teeth, and winked.

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**Please please please review! Comment! What do you like? What do you not like? What are you excited to see?**

**I'm excited for Claire's development. And for the other characters to come into play. Let me know what you think!  
xoxox**

## 2. Chapter 2

**Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or any of the characters created by the show.**

**My OC is Claire Owens.**

**Yes, Billy is straight in this story. And he is abusive.**

**There will be abuse (trigger warning) at some point in the story. Not in this chapter.**

**This chapter is still on the short side, but I really wanted to keep writing to get this one out there, and to kick start the forthcoming exciting stuff. Please let me know what you think! xoxox**

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When Claire regained her breath, she turned and quickly hurried into the school. She wasn't sure what it was she had felt for that boy or why he had winked at her. She knew for sure she was intimidated by him. He was so *different*... certainly different from her guy friends in Michigan. She figured she shouldn't be thinking much about it anyways; he probably winked at every girl. The thought caused a slight sinking feeling in her stomach, but she pushed it away. She walked around for a bit, finally finding the guidance counselor's office to get her class schedule.

The counselor was pretty friendly, showing her to her locker and first class room while pointing out many more of her classes on the way. He told her about some of the more popular extracurricular activities, and let her know that if she needed anything, she could always talk to him. She appreciated his kindness, and walked nervously into her first class after the bell had already rung.

She was starting the semester just one week later than everyone else, since her family's move had taken a bit longer than planned. She wouldn't be behind, but she would still be considered the "new girl". Claire hoped that this might actually make it a little easier to meet people. Good ice breaker.

"Class, this is Ms. Claire Owens. She is a brand new student to Hawkins, so please be sure to introduce yourselves after class. You may have a seat, dear." Her teacher, an older woman with gray hair and kind eyes, gestured to the desks.

"Thank you." Claire smiled, and took a seat in the second row. She felt slightly nervous, but the nerves made her excited, too. She listened avidly to the biology lecture and took notes, happy that the lesson being taught was on something she partially remembered from her sophomore year. The class seemed to end quickly, and she waited for most of the more eager students to clear out of the room before she attempted to get up. She smoothed out her knee-length brown skirt and pulled down the sleeves of her yellow knitted sweater. Her style was simple, though sometimes on the bright side, but she didn't mind. She wore a clean white bow which appeared to hold up her ponytail. Her hair was long enough to still fall in waves down her back, and small wisps of hair framed her face.

Her next few classes were pretty uneventful, thought she began to notice the couple of people who were in many of her classes. Maybe she would try to sit with them during lunch. She walked out of the classroom to her locker, finding the combination on a piece of paper she tucked into the pages of one of her text books. She frowned as she tried the combination a couple more times, and it didn't work. She tugged a bit harder on the lock to no avail. She double-checked that she had the locker number and combination correct, which she did. Strange...

"Hey, I'm sorry..." A guy with long wind-swept hair appeared beside her as she was about to give up trying with that locker. "Not to be like, weird or anything. But, I had this locker last year and it sucks. And it only opens if you whack it right before you get to the last number." Claire smiled.

"Okay..." She slowly turned from him to the lock, motioning that she would try it out again. She started putting in the combination, and then as she turned to the last number gave the locker a light tap. It didn't work. She looked at him with a look that said, 'Well? What gives?'

"No, no, no..." He said, holding back a laugh. "Is it okay if I show

you? There's a certain way you have to do it." Claire laughed.

"Sure. But I'm going to put in the first two numbers. Then you can come in and do whatever you need to for the last one." He nodded.

"Fair enough. I wouldn't trust me, either." She stepped back from the locker, and told him the last number- 16. "Alright, so here's what you've gotta do." As he clicked towards the final number, he gave the locker a solid hit, sort of lifting the door upwards, and it miraculously opened when the dial hit 16.

"Wow, I'm impressed!" Claire exclaimed, laughing again. "I'm not sure I'll be able to do it every time, but... thank you!"

"You'll get used to it, it's not that bad." The guy smiled reassuringly.

"Or I can just wave you down every time I need to get into my locker." She joked.

"Or you can absolutely do that." He smiled warmly. "So, you're new to Hawkins, right?" Claire nodded. "Well, welcome. My name is Steve." He held out his hand and she shook it firmly.

"Thank you, Steve. I'm Claire."

"I'm heading to lunch now with my girlfriend, Nancy, and a few of our friends. Would like to join us?"

"Actually, that would be really awesome." Claire smiled, and she felt warm and happy. She was making friends- on the first day! Steve hung out by her locker as she finished gathering the books for her afternoon classes.

It was as she closed her locker that she saw him behind Steve- the guy from the parking lot that morning. He was leaning against the wall next to the guy's bathroom, staring right at her. He caught her off guard. She smiled nervously, and...

And she dropped her books.

She looked at her stuff on the floor in momentary disbelief, and quickly glanced back up at the boy who had startled her in the first

place. He remained unmoved, but smirked and gave an amused chuckle.

"You ok?" Steve asked as he knelt with her and got her belongings together.

"Yeah, sorry. I just tripped or something." She lied. "Thank you."

"Hey, no problem. It happens to the best of us." He helped her up and they headed towards the cafeteria. Claire tried not to look towards the boy from the parking lot, but when she did happen to glance that way he was still staring. She felt his eyes on her until she rounded the corner down the hall and was surely out of his sight.

Claire was introduced to Steve's girlfriend, Nancy, who she noticed quickly had been in almost all of her classes. They immediately clicked, and she was grateful. She tried to remain engaged in their lunchtime conversation while her mind drifted off to the boy in the hall with the long hair, ear piercings, and beautiful face.

Claire was not one to judge based on appearance or clothing. Status never mattered to her when it came to who she would befriend or talk to. His appearance definitely intrigued her, and admittedly had caused her to assume that he may not find *her* style appealing. His tight clothing, his mustache, his necklace... It was all new and interesting. Something about him left her a bit unsettled- though not necessarily in a bad way. She was curious about him, but also *very* intimidated by him. What was with the staring? Had she done something to him? But my goodness, how he had *affected* her. She'd been smitten a couple of times with boys in the past, but nothing quite like this. She felt something in him, compelling her towards him.

Once again, she tried to snap out of it. She ended up walking to her next class with Nancy, and they ended up making plans to hang out Friday night after school so Nancy could show Claire around Hawkins a bit.

Her last classes were unproductive. Her mind was darting between her excitement to be making friends, and her curiosity for the boy in the hall. The boy in the parking lot. The one with the nice car and



strange, mature, rebellious style.

She wondered if he was thinking about her.

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**Please pleaseeee review/comment! Thank ya. (:**

### 3. Chapter 3

**Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or any of the characters created by the show.**

**My OC is Claire Owens.**

**There *will* be abuse in the story. Not in this chapter.**

**I am extremely flattered and excited by all of the subscribers the story has received so far! If you wouldn't mind, pleaseee leave me a comment/review! I'd really love some feedback.**

**What do you like? What do you not like? Does Claire annoy you? Do you think she's just swell?**

**Let me know please! (:**

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The next couple of weeks flew by for Claire. She was staying on top of her classes, hanging out with Nancy and Steve and perfecting her locker-opening skills. She had to admit that adjusting to Hawkins was not as easy as she thought it would be since it was so rural. There wasn't a whole lot to do other than going to school and hanging out with Nancy at her house. She'd also made the track and field team, which was somewhat new for her but she really liked it so far. She was generally coordinated and athletic, and was certainly strong for a girl her age. She had learned to hurdle briefly in middle school, and since the school didn't have any stand-outs in that event currently, she was able to barely make the cut to be on the team. She had a ways to go before she could compete, but she was sure she could improve her time if she practiced her technique enough.

She was learning a bit more about her mystery crush, if you could even call it a "crush". The boy from the hallway's name was Billy. She didn't see him much in school, but now that she was staying after for track and field practice, she saw him almost every day. He was on the basketball team with Steve, and when the team would do conditioning or strength training outside, there he was. It was annoyingly normal for half of the cheerleading squad to ogle over

him when the teams were taking water breaks. And admittedly, everything Claire knew about him, she knew from eavesdropping on their gossip.

"Oh my God, did you *see* Billy lifting that super heavy weight?"

"I'm totally going to get him to ask me out!"

"His pants are so *tight*, I feel like I can see everything, but I still want to see more..."

Any number of girls could be heard saying one of a few repetitive flirtatious statements when referring to Billy and his butt. Apparently he was also new to Hawkins, which excited many of the girls. It was not just Claire who was intrigued by his mysterious rebel style. Any time he walked by the group of girls, *many* times shirtless, they would absolutely swoon. He didn't even look at them.

He *did*, however, look at Claire. All the time. Strangely enough, even when he was leaned against the water cooler, licking his lips, showcasing his flirtatious smile while talking to some girl, Claire would notice his eyes dart up to hers. It's like he always had an eye on her. She had a feeling like she was his prey, and he was a lion waiting to pounce. But she would ignore the feeling, telling herself that she was obviously reading too much into the fact that they made eye contact a few times. *I'm sure he doesn't even think twice about it. Plus, he's flirting with another girl, right in front of you. Calm yourself.*

Though, as far as Claire had heard, he hadn't officially gone out with anyone in Hawkins. Yet.

Claire had just achieved her best hurdle time (though it still wasn't a very competitive time) when she heard the boom of the thunder. It had been gray all that Thursday without a drop of rain, and now that it was Friday afternoon the storm was rolling in. The team did not make it to the locker room before it started pouring, and Claire was soaked to the bone. Most of the team changed and left immediately, excited to get a kick start on whatever plans they had for Friday night. Claire had plans to hang out with Nancy later, and Steve was supposed to give both of them a ride home that afternoon. Since Nancy was probably in the library, and Claire didn't feel like getting

her clothes soaked again walking across the school, she decided to shower, change, and head to the bleachers of the basketball court while Steve finished up with practice. Claire was wearing a light purple long sleeved button-up shirt tucked into her favorite pair of jeans. She shook her hair dry as much as she could with a towel, and decided against trying to put her purple bow back in her hair. Her cheeks were still a bit red from the repeated sprints she'd been performing before it started raining. She shrugged, grabbed her backpack and walked out of the locker room down the hallway to enter the arena.

Her eyes immediately wandered to a shirtless, sweaty Billy casually tossing the basketball into the hoop. The boys were apparently warming up for a scrimmage, shirts versus skins. She made eye contact with Steve and waved. He waved back as she took a seat and she pulled out her algebra notebook. Hopefully if she could focus on studying, she could refrain from staring at a certain boy until she started obviously drooling. The whistle blew, and the boys began to play. She was stubbornly focusing on her plan to study, though she knew she wasn't retaining much. She kept her eyes on her notebook regardless, until she heard a loud screech and a laugh. She jerked her head up to see Billy tossing the ball in the opposing team's hoop, leaving a frustrated looking Steve on his butt in the middle of the court. Steve got up and brushed himself off. When Claire looked at Billy again, he was running his hand through his hair, looking at her, smirking. Claire scowled, confused, and nervous, and looked away.

This time when the coach blew the whistle, and they began playing again, Claire kept her eyes up. Steve got the ball and worked his way forward. He turned his body to block Billy, but he was too good. He got around Steve again, taking the ball and this time shooting for three points. Swish. Claire hadn't watched Steve play before, but from what she'd heard he had been one of the better players on the team. Billy was giving him a run for his money. And Claire couldn't figure out if she was impressed, or somewhat defensive of her friend. Finally, one of Steve's teammates was able to get the ball back to Steve near the net, but when he went for the layup, Billy blocked it. One of Billy's teammates returned it for two points. Steve shook his head, trying to shake it off.

"What the hell, Harrington?" One of his team mates whacked him in the chest. "You had that, man." His head dropped again, and he looked up at Claire.

She smiled reassuringly at him, and mouthed, "You've got this." He nodded, looking doubtful, but went back to the game. While Steve's team didn't get totally blown out- the final score was 44 to 36- Steve only managed to score twice on Billy, whereas Billy made the majority of the baskets for his team. After a quick huddle, the coach ended the practice for the day, and the guys scattered, grabbing their things and heading to the locker room. Steve walked by her just to let her know he'd be out soon, and she nodded and went back to her algebra. It was only about 15 minutes before he walked into the arena ready to go. She gathered her things and headed into the main hallway of the gym with him, surprised as she noticed it was no longer raining. As they walked out into the parking lot, where Nancy was waiting by the car, they heard a voice shout from behind them.

"Hey, Harrington!" His voice was silky and interesting, and he had an accent that Claire couldn't quite place. Billy jogged up to Steve, extending his hand. "Hey, man. I just wanted to say good game." Steve hesitated to take his hand. "I know I can get real competitive, but honestly you didn't make it easy for me today."

*That doesn't seem very true,* thought Claire. It was then that she noticed the fact that she and Billy had never actually been this close to each other. If she wanted to, she could reach out and touch him. Not that she would. Not that she *wanted* to. *Ugh.*

Steve finally took his hand and shook it. "I'll have to come back next week better prepared." Steve smiled, and though the comment seemed friendly, Claire thought she could detect a hint of seriousness in it.

"I'm sure you will." Billy smiled. As he turned to walk towards his car, he looked at Claire. He smiled at her, too, and she felt it in her core, way more than the other times he'd made eye contact with her. He was so close, and it felt so deliberate and personal. She tried to smile back at him politely, almost nonchalantly, but she wasn't sure what kind of look she had actually given him. Looking away from him felt heavy and difficult, like there was a rope attaching the two of them

and she had to apply a certain amount of force to break it. She couldn't stop thinking about him. She could still see him, right there, so close to her, even though she was in the back seat of Steve's car, now almost to Nancy's house. She hadn't participated in the conversation much, as if she was in a trance. She didn't notice as Steve studied her face in the mirror.

*My God, Claire. Snap out of it. You are so obsessed with him! You don't even know him!*

They pulled up to the Wheeler's house, and she began gathering up her things. Nancy got out, and as Claire moved to follow, Steve grabbed her softly by the sleeve. She looked at him , surprised.

"Claire, I know this is going to sound weird, or whatever. But I don't know about that Billy guy."

"What?" She asked, shocked. She hadn't told anyone about her little crush. She hadn't acted on it. She'd never talked to the guy. Why was he saying anything? Did Billy say something? Did he ask about her, or talk about her? Or did the look on her face in the parking lot just totally give her away?

"It's just... I don't know. He doesn't really seem like a good guy." Steve's words seemed genuine and concerned.

"I don't even know him." Claire shrugged. "Why would I...?"

"You don't have to explain anything to me." He assured her. "I just wanted to let you know, okay?"

Claire nodded hesitantly. "Sure. Thanks, Steve." She stepped out of the car, and Nancy was waiting for her at the front door.

"What was that about?" Nancy asked.

"Nothing..." Nancy gave her a look. "Well, not nothing. Sorry." Claire was so overwhelmed and happy but frustrated and confused and worried. "Can we talk about it later? I'm starving, and I need some time to just... think. Or something."

"Sure." Nancy seemed slightly concerned, but she wouldn't push

Claire. And they would talk about it later, probably while listening to a record or painting their nails.

Again, Claire was distracted while trying to make conversation with the Wheeler's at the dinner table. Their parents were very different than her own, with Mrs. Wheeler being so eccentric and Mr. Wheeler being extremely uninvolved. But Claire was polite. They were extremely inviting and accepting of her being over for dinner and being at their home in general, which was good because she'd spent a good bit of time there in the last couple weeks.

The conversation at the table was wrapping up, and Claire was relieved. Not because she was that repulsed by the family's company, but she was excited to talk to Nancy about Billy. She needed to bounce her thoughts and feelings off of somebody else. Honestly, she just needed to get it out of her *system*.

"So, Claire, do you have a boyfriend?" Mrs. Wheeler asked. Claire nearly choked on her water.

"Mom!" Nancy argued. Mike looked embarrassed, blushing. Mr. Wheeler had his nose in a newspaper, though even he glanced up briefly. Claire was caught off guard, given the thoughts about Billy that had been running through her head just a few moments earlier.

"Oh, uh..." Claire stuttered nervously. "No, I don't."

"Did you have one where you lived before? In.. oh, where was it...? Michigan! Did you have a boyfriend in Michigan?" Nancy groaned, embarrassed.

"No, I didn't." She'd been on a couple of dates, but they had never gone very well. And while there were a few she'd been interested in over the years, it felt that she was always passed over for someone prettier, or more popular, or for a girl who wore shorter skirts than she did.

"Well, that's just crazy. Pretty girl like you!" She waved her hand at her, simultaneously trying to get the youngest of the children to eat. "Oh, sweetie, you'll find someone!" Claire blushed.

"May we *please* be excused?!" Nancy cut in before the conversation could carry on.

"Yeah, me too." Mike chimed in.

"Oh, fine." Nancy and Mike bolted up, stomping off. Claire followed a bit more politely.

"Thank you for dinner." She smiled at Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler.

"Oh, anytime." Mrs. Wheeler smiled. Claire made her way up the stairs to Nancy's room. Nancy was sitting on her bed, waiting expectantly. Claire plopped down next to her.

"So..." Nancy started. "What's going on?"

Claire smiled a little. *Well, here it goes.*

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**Again, please review! Thanks, guys! xoxox**



## 4. Chapter 4

**Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or any of the characters created by the show.**

**My OC is Claire Owens.**

**PLEASE please leave me some reviews! Reviews really drive me to keep writing. (: Thank you guys so much for all your feedback so far!**

---

Claire had just spilled everything to Nancy, explaining essentially that she'd kept seeing Billy around, and that she always caught him staring at her, what she'd heard about him, then the events at basketball practice and in the parking lot, finally ending with what Steve said.

"I don't know, now that I've said it out loud this all seems totally dumb." Claire finished. "I mean, we've never even really talked before."

Nancy smiled a little, also pondering. "Maybe, but it sort of sounds like he might be interested. I mean, why else would Steve have said anything if Billy didn't seem interested in you?" Claire's heart fluttered. "The real question is, would you really go out with him?"

*A question I've been asking myself for a while*, Claire thought. "I don't know... probably not. If Steve thinks he's a jerk, he probably is."

"You know," Nancy hesitantly started, "Steve wasn't always the nicest guy at Hawkins, either."

"Really?" Claire asked, surprised. He was definitely popular, and sometimes he could be super sarcastic, but Claire had always seen him be respectful of Nancy.

"Yeah, totally." She looked at her hands. "I think he was always a good guy on the inside, but for a while he was just hanging around with these jerks, and I don't know. Maybe he was trying to impress

them?"

"Do you think *you* changed him?" She smiled bashfully.

"I don't know if it was me... But he's definitely matured a lot since we've started dating." Nancy paused in thought. "I'm not saying go out with him even if he's not a good guy," she corrected, "I just mean... I'd wait until you see it for yourself or hear more to decide that you don't want to go out with him. Steve could have just been mad that he got shown up in basketball, too."

*That's an understatement. But maybe she has a point.*

"Besides," she continued, "theoretically, if he *did* ask you out, what could be the harm in going on *one* date?" Claire smiled at the idea.

"I guess you're right... He might not even ask me out, though."

"I guess only time will tell." Nancy smiled and nudged Claire playfully.

Their conversation continued on well into the night, and it was quite late by the time they settled down to go to sleep. Claire's mind was racing with thoughts about Billy given her conversation with Nancy. *What if he really asked me out?*

Soon enough, he was haunting her dreams.

...

*"Oh, hey, Claire." Billy was apparently waiting for Claire at her locker. "How about you and me ditch this place, and go take a long drive in my car?" He was smiling seductively at her, and polished it off with an attractive wink. He was also shirtless.*

*"Only if I get to choose the music." Claire smoothly drawled, much more confidently than usual. He nodded, impressed, as she strode past him in the direction of the parking lot, knowing he'd follow. She wasn't wearing her usual plain clothing today- she looked just as risqué as he did in her short denim skirt, tight black sweater and heels. Her hair was down and tousled, and she was wearing red lipstick. Billy walked closely behind her, admiring her and how gracefully she walked. Everyone in the halls*

*stopped to look at her in admiration. They finally reached the parking lot; his car was parked in the drop off loop, waiting for them. Billy opened the passenger door for her and he took her hand as she slid in. Before he could shut the door, shouting came from behind them.*

*"Wait!"*

*"Stop!"*

*"Claire, come back!"*

*Claire looked around Billy to see her friends and family scrambling through the hallway of the school after them. She saw Steve, Nancy, her parents, even Nancy's little brother and mom. She saw a few of her closest track teammates and her favorite teacher. She saw a couple of her best friends from Michigan. They were all racing in a frantic herd to reach her. The looks on their faces were all pleading her to get out of the car.*

*Billy closed the door, and she stared at them, paralyzed and unnerved, unsure what to do.*

*Billy cackled as he slid into the driver's seat and started the car. "You ready for this, Claire?" He smiled wickedly. Just as they were about to pull off, Steve stepped in front of the car.*

*"Claire, wait! Don't do this!" Her other friends and family clawed at the doors and windows of the car with no success. Nancy was crying on the other side of the passenger window. Claire numbly put her fingers up to touch the glass.*

*"You always were a pain in my ass, Harrington." Claire glanced back to Steve, shouting and slamming his hands on the hood of the car, looking at her with worry.*

*With an excited, evil yell into the air, Billy stepped on the pedal and the car propelled forwards.*

*...*

*Claire's eyes bolted open. She was in a mild uncomfortable sweat, and her heart was racing. Her eyes found Nancy, and Claire assured herself that the dream wasn't real. It wasn't real.*

She laid back down and took a few deep breaths, looking at the clock beside the bed. 7:30AM. While the girls usually slept a bit later on the weekends, Claire couldn't imagine she would be able to go back to sleep. Even if she could, she didn't really want to. She was still uneasy from the dream, and very confused. She very rarely dreamed as vividly as she just had. It felt *so real*.

*What did that mean?* She questioned as she quietly got up and put her sweat shirt on. She grabbed her back pack and made her way to the living room to do some homework. *A dream like that has to mean something...*

She worked through some English homework, reading and summarizing an excerpt from *Romeo and Juliet*. She internally criticized how unrealistic the whole Shakespearean situation was.

*Yes, true love is an amazing thing, but you didn't even know him.* Claire thought in reference to Juliet risking everything and running away for Romeo. *You had only just met him- for all you know, he could be absolutely terrible for you, and you gave up your life for him.* She admitted to herself that her current thoughts were a little bit more cynical than usual.

*I won't go out with Billy.* She decided to herself. *Something in my gut is telling me not to. I've always listened to my gut.*

And she left it at that.

She spent most of the morning with Nancy before they left to meet up with Steve and a few other friends at the movies in the early afternoon. Everyone else was planning on getting burgers and shakes that night, but Claire decided to go home to have dinner with her parents.

She enjoyed having dinner with them. Her parents were so interested in her life and loved hearing stories about her day. Claire was very open with them, and had always felt like she could be. Her dad told funny stories of her goofy uncle at work. Her mom discussed upcoming Halloween plans to decorate the house and to have some work friends over. That night, Claire fell asleep on the sofa watching a movie with them. She fell into a deeper sleep as her dad covered

her with a blanket and kissed the top of her head.

A calm rushed over her which was soon interrupted by another strange dream.

...

*"Oh, hey, Claire." Billy was once again waiting for Claire at her locker. "How about you and me ditch this place, and go take a long drive in my car?" He smiled softly, tenderly taking Claire's hand. They were both dressed in what was normal for them. Claire's hair was held back loosely in a bow.*

*This time Claire felt uneasy walking up to him. "I don't know..." Billy's face fell. He looked hurt and confused. Claire's stomach knotted up at the sight.*

*"I thought you liked me, Claire." He let go of her hand.*

*"I do, I just..."*

*"I thought you wanted to be with me... Why are you doing this?"*

*"I'm sorry, Billy. I just don't..."*

*"Then why are you doing this?" He asked again. He looked like a wounded animal.*

*She turned as she heard shouting behind her.*

*"Get out of here!"*

*"Go away, loser!"*

*"Did you really think she wanted to be with you?!"*

*It was once again a chorus of shouts coming from her friends and family. They all wore looks of disgust and hatred. Most of them were smiling smugly. They were all shouting at Billy, twisting the knife in the wound. She looked back at him, and he looked at her, questioning why she wouldn't intervene. She felt frozen.*

*"I thought you weren't like them, Claire. I-I... thought you were different." He stammered as his bottom lip quivered, and he turned to run away.*

*She tried to say something; she tried to shout his name. She tried to run after him, but she couldn't. She was paralyzed. She couldn't do anything as all of those closest to her berated him with nasty word and shouts.*

*"That's right, keep running!"*

*"You're worthless!"*

*"How pathetic! He's crying!"*

*The hoard laughed behind her, laughed at the sight of him running out of the school, alone and afraid and heart broken.*

*She felt like crying. She felt like protecting him. She felt like screaming.*

*But she couldn't do anything. She was helpless.*

...

Claire woke early Sunday morning, this time on the verge of tears. *What the hell is going on?*

She attempted to study a bit before finally giving up, instead choosing to mope around her room for a bit. After a while, she decided that she had to do something to get her mind off of things-she had to shake this feeling.

She had breakfast with her parents before heading off on her bike to the high school. She would run around the track for a bit and practice her hurdle. She had improved quite a bit over the course of a couple weeks, but she was determined to improve enough to compete at the team's first meet in mid-October.

She followed the usual routine from practice, beginning with a brisk 1-mile jog around the track, then transitioning to some basic callisthenic exercises. She had worked up quite a sweat before she began her routine sprints. While there was still a morning chill in the air, the sun beat down on her mercilessly. She felt her cheeks and shoulders getting warm and hoped she wouldn't burn. For a second,

she regretted wearing such little clothing when it was so sunny outside, but she figured she'd rather be more comfortable. She did not typically wear such a loose tank top that just barely covered her midriff with shorts as short as the ones she currently wore, but she knew no one else would be at the school and the normal practice clothing was too tight, long and itchy.

She pulled the hurdles out from under the bleachers and placed them in their respective spots on the track. She then paced over to the starting line, stretching out as much as she could. If she could improve her flexibility, she wouldn't have to work as hard to hoist herself over the hurdles. She took a moment to catch her breath completely, brushing sweat off of her forehead and staring at the track, trying not to be intimidated. She could do this. She glanced at the stop watch in her palm, which was still set to the last time she received- 21.45 seconds. That was one of her better times. She needed to at least improve her time to 19.0 to be good enough to participate in an event.

She zeroed the stop watch and knelt at the starting line. She raised her hips into the air. Then she took off. She clicked the stop watch as she crossed the finish line.

22.16

Claire shook her head, disappointed. She could do better than that. She paced a bit to give herself a rest, then began again.

21.37

She huffed again. Better, but not good enough. *Come on, Claire. Focus. Remember what Coach tells you- don't be afraid of the hurdle. Don't hesitate. It should be a fluid motion, like the hurdle isn't even there.* Claire shook off her previous attempts, trying to focus. She made her way back to the starting line, hands on her hips.

*Don't hesitate.*

She got into her starting position, raised her hips, and took off.

The first two hurdles were totally fluid. Effortless, almost. As her

thoughts darted excitedly to imagining how it would feel to finally clock a time shorter than 20.0, her back foot caught on the third hurdle and she tumbled onto the track.

Her palms and left knee skidded across the hot pavement, and Claire winced as she tried to push herself up too soon. She stopped and gave herself a second to stretch out and examine her knee. It was sore, scuffed, and bleeding. She took a couple of deep breaths, telling herself that falling is a part of improving. It means she was going faster- she wasn't used to hurdling at that speed. Once she got her timing right, she would certainly improve her time. For today, she would rest a bit, clean herself up, and come back tomorrow, ready to go again. She gingerly pushed herself off of the track, testing how it felt to put pressure on her left side. She felt assured as she realized it was only sore because of the scrape, which would probably only hurt like this for a day or two.

That being said, the sting worsened significantly as she pulled the hurdles back into their place under the bleachers. By the time she got back to her bike, her knee burned so badly when she bent it to pedal that she decided to walk her bike home. At this point, there was also a gross amount of blood dripping down her leg. She hoped she could get home before it reached her socks, but she had a long way to go. She threw the small pack she'd brought, holding only her wallet and a small water bottle that she'd drained way earlier over her shoulder and began her trek.

Just as she walked out onto the main road in front of the school, she heard a loud engine and equally loud, blaring music. She looked in front of her up the road to see a familiar car- Billy's- working its way quickly towards her. Too quickly, in fact. Her stomach dropped. She was not on the same side of the road as Billy's car, but she scooted as closely to the edge of the gravel as she could anyways. She looked down at her bike, hoping he wouldn't recognize her. How embarrassing, to be seen by anyone, much less Billy, in her loose track clothing, sweaty, bleeding, hurt and probably a bit sun burnt.

She kept her eyes down, stray hairs falling over her face, as Billy's car approached. She almost sighed with relief as the car passed her, then she heard it screech to a halt. The engine revved loudly as Billy put the car in reverse, and in what felt like no time, Billy Hargrove was



sitting in his car, in the middle of the road, just feet away from Claire. He turned the music down.

"Hey." Claire was forced to finally look up at him. He was smiling enticingly at her, his tongue darting to his lower lip.

"Hi." Claire responded politely as she stopped walking.

"It's Claire, right? You're friends with Harrington." She nodded, feeling a flutter in her chest. How did he know her name? "I'm Billy Hargrove."

*I know who you are.*

"Nice to meet you." Claire said sweetly, innocently. Hopefully not like she'd been thinking about him nonstop for the last few days.

"Can I give you a ride home?" He asked. Claire paused, not sure how to respond. When she didn't answer immediately, he continued. "I noticed you were limping... It's no problem for me, I just gotta run to the drug store real quick." His voice was so silky, like caramel. He inhaled the cigarette dangling limply from his hand, eyeing her, waiting for a response.

"I... can't." Claire stammered nervously. "I have my bike with me." *Good excuse.*

"If you want, you can leave it at the school for today." He offered, blowing smoke slowly out of his mouth. "I'll even give you a ride tomorrow morning. Then you can ride it home tomorrow afternoon." He grinned charmingly.

"Really, I'm fine walking." Claire smiled kindly. He was silent for a moment, looking her up and down. "Thank you, though." She added, not wanting to offend him. Billy sighed loudly.

"Alright, fine." He put the car in park and jumped out, dropping his cigarette and stepping on it. Claire looked either way down the road; no cars. What was he doing? She backed away instinctively, but he didn't move towards her. He walked to the passenger side of the car, pulled the seat up, then rummaged around the back seat for a moment. Claire peered curiously around the car, trying to catch a

glimpse of what he was looking for, but before she could, he stood up, throwing the door closed. He carried a water bottle and a small towel, working his way towards Claire.

"If you're not gonna let me give you a ride," he began, squeezing out a bit of water over the towel, "then here." He held out the damp towel. Claire looked up at him in disbelief, not saying a word. "For your knee. You'll still have to clean it up, obviously, but it should help until you get home."

Claire was touched, and impressed. Her heart was racing. *He's... he's being nice...* She thought.

"You gonna take it?" He asked curiously, smirking. She extended her hand and took the towel gratefully. Her fingers grazed his... She thought she might faint.

"Thank you so much." She smiled at him, this time more genuinely than before. Billy studied her for a moment, not yet moving back to his car. She looked at her feet.

"My offer still stands if you want a ride." He shrugged, finally turning away from her. Claire let out her breath, which she had apparently been holding. Billy kept his eyes on her as he got back into the car, revving the engine. "You still wanna walk?"

Claire's mind was racing. She looked at her bike, then looked up at Billy. He had a look on his face like he already knew what she'd decided. Without Claire having to say anything else, he said "I'll pull around next to the bike rack, okay?"

Claire nodded and smiled. "Sure. Thank you." She turned around and began pushing the bike back into the school parking lot, and Billy drove next to her. She kept her eyes on her bike, and on the damp towel she held, wondering how she'd ended up in this situation. She was about to get into a car with Billy Hargrove. *Wow.*

She finally steered the bike into a spot on the rack in front of the school, and Billy was waiting behind her. He'd lit up another cigarette already, which was currently hanging out of his mouth, while he looked in the rearview mirror at himself, brushing his hair

back. She smiled softly. He wasn't intimidating. He wasn't a scary person. He was just a boy, and she was just a girl. Her dreams were just that- dreams. She had nothing to be afraid of.

She found comfort in his fidgeting, and walked up to his car, holding the towel and her small backpack. He reached over to pop the door open for her, and as she sat down he took a long, deliberate drag from his cigarette.

"Took you long enough."

---

**Again, please review! Thanks so much for reading! Xoxox**

## 5. Chapter 5

**Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or any of the characters created by the show.**

**My OC is Claire Owens.**

**You know the drill: Read. Enjoy. Please leave comments. I really *really* love feedback, whether it be positive or negative.**

---

Claire winced as she began to scrub the dried blood off of her knee.

"What the hell did you do?" Billy asked, pulling out of the school parking lot swiftly.

"I was practicing my hurdle and I tripped." Claire admitted bashfully.

"Over one of the hurdles?" Billy clarified.

"Yup." Claire nodded.

"Ouch. That sucks." Billy sympathized.

"Thanks for letting me ruin your towel." Claire glanced at him. "I can try to clean it tonight."

"Don't worry about it." Billy said. "I always keep a stash of crappy towels on hand, just in case my baby needs some work done." He patted the dashboard affectionately.

"This is a really nice car..." Claire admitted. "Did you buy it yourself?"

"Sure did." He smiled to himself. "Worked every summer since I was 13 to save up the money."

"That's quite a commitment."

"I suppose everyone's gotta be committed to something." He smirked at Claire. They peeled into the parking lot of the drug store, and Billy pulled the keys out of the ignition. "You coming in?"

Claire looked at her knee, realizing she should probably grab some large bandages.

"Sure." She smiled at Billy. She was very aware of how much skin she was showing in her practice clothing when she stood up out of the car, clutching her small pack. She tried to pull her shorts down subtly, but she couldn't do much without exposing her midriff, as well. Since she had worn this outfit in middle school, she had acquired a much longer, leaner set of legs. It definitely showed.

Billy opened the door to the drug store for Claire. "Thank you." She smiled and nodded at him.

"My pleasure." Claire worked her way to the aisle with the first aid supplies. To her surprise, Billy followed.

"So how long have you been in track?" Billy asked.

"This is actually the first time I've been on a track team in a long time." Claire admitted, perusing the different sizes and shapes of bandages and gauze.

"Really? I wouldn't have guessed that watching you in practice." Billy said charmingly. "You're really good." Claire scoffed.

"I appreciate the compliment," she said slowly as she pulled one box off the shelf and examined it, "but I'm really not. I only just barely made the team."

"Well, I think you look good." Claire looked at him with surprise, nearly dropping the box she held. He didn't meet her gaze, instead appearing to be interested in something on the shelf next to her.

"Thanks." Claire put the bandages back, opting instead for gauze and tape. "How long have you played basketball?"

"I used to play a lot at this crappy court near my house in California, but this is the first time I've played on a school team." Claire raised her eyebrows.

"Seriously?" Billy smirked, enjoying the surprise in her voice.

"Yeah, well the team was a lot better at the school I used to go to. I never tried out because I knew I wouldn't make it. It was much different than *this* hick town." He spat, his mood changing a bit.

"So you're not liking Hawkins much?" Claire inquired, perusing the antibiotic ointments to prolong their conversation.

"Nah. As soon as I graduate I'm getting the hell out of here. What about you?"

"Well..." Claire thought for a moment. "I don't love the area. But the people are nice and welcoming, and my parents are really happy. I may as well try to enjoy it while I'm here. After school, who knows." Billy looked at her with something that Claire couldn't quite place... Curiosity? Surprise? Maybe admiration?

"I wish I felt the way you did." He shook his head as if there was no way he could convince himself that Hawkins was more than just a crap town.

"Well, I can imagine it's a lot different moving here from California. A lot harder." Claire offered. Billy eyed her, wearing just a hint of a smile. "But at least you get to be on the basketball team."

"I suppose so." They maintained eye contact for a just a bit longer before Claire looked down at her feet nervously. She walked past him towards the front of the store.

"Well, I'm all set." She held up the supplies she'd chosen. "Didn't you have to get something?"

"Yeah, just some cigarettes at the counter." They walked up to the front together. As Claire sat her items on the counter, Billy tossed down a tube of antibiotic cream that he must have grabbed when Claire wasn't looking. She glanced up at him with surprise. "I'll take a carton of Camels, and this stuff." Billy said to the cashier, motioning to Claire's gauze, tape and cream. "And that'll be it. Thanks."

"Oh, you don't have to..." Claire began.

"I got it." He waved her off. *What is even happening right now?*

"Thank you..." Billy paid and grabbed their bag, walking past Claire to open the door for her- again. The drive to Claire's house was relatively silent as Claire gave Billy directions while pondering his motives. Soon enough, they were pulling into her driveway.

"Alright, miss Claire." He handed her the bag from the drug store with her items. "See ya first thing tomorrow morning?"

"You really don't have to give me a ride again," Claire protested a bit. "I can get my parents to drive me, or I can get someone else to come pick me up. I don't want to inconvenience you."

"It's no trouble at all." He smiled, leaning his right arm over the back of the passenger seat. Claire glanced at his arm, then back at him, trying not to let a bashful smile creep across her face.

"Well, okay then. Thank you." Claire opened the car door and turned to grab hold of her bags and the damp bloody towel. "And, thanks a lot for everything today. That was really sweet of you."

"Well, what can I say? Something comes over me when I see a pretty girl that needs a little help." He smiled and winked.

*Oh. My. God.*

This time, Claire couldn't hide her smile.

"See you tomorrow, Billy." She swung the car door shut and turned to walk to her porch. She was grinning stupidly, butterflies fluttering in her stomach. He honked twice as he peeled out of her drive way. When he was out of sight, Claire jogged into her house, to her room, plopped on her bed and picked up the phone.

"Hello Mrs. Wheeler, is Nancy there? Thank you!... Nancy? Oh my gosh, you will *not* believe what just happened!"

...

Claire waited nervously by the window. It was just 20 minutes before school started, where was he?

"Honey, are you sure you don't want me to drive you to school?" Her

mother asked, concerned. Claire had told her parents a little about Billy last night, but not a ton. She told them he'd offered to give her a ride home yesterday, and to school this morning, because she'd injured herself yesterday. She told them he took her to the store to get gauze. She did *not* tell them about his car, his smoking, and certainly not that he was a senior.

...Not that he called her pretty.

The memory made Claire shiver a bit. *He called me pretty.*

She checked the mirror again. The top half of her hair was pulled up into a high ponytail. She wore a white and baby blue striped turtleneck sweater and dark khaki pants with her white Keds. Nancy had helped her decide on her outfit while they were on the phone last night. While it didn't look like an outfit that was put together to *obviously* impress Billy, the way the tight sweater and pants fit her accentuated her athletic, but feminine, figure. It was the perfect, "I'm not dressing to impress you, but I do look better than usual, but that must just be a coincidence because I just pulled this old sweater out of the back of my closet" outfit.

Claire jumped at the sound of the engine revving from the road. She glanced out the window to see Billy rapidly swinging into her driveway.

"Bye, mom! Love you!" Claire hurried out the door before her mother could respond. She smiled as she lowered herself into the passenger seat of Billy's car, once again.

"Sorry I'm late," Billy said as he backed the car out of the driveway quickly. "I had to take my step sister to school early, but she took her sweet time getting ready this morning." He sounded a bit agitated.

"It's fine." Claire assured him, hoping to lighten his mood. Though admittedly, she was a little anxious knowing she'd likely be late to class.

"Don't worry; I'll get us there on time." Billy smiled mischievously at her, speeding up. Claire smiled a bit, too. She'd never been much of a thrill seeker, but something about him made the situation a little



more exciting.

"Don't drive *too* fast. I really don't mind being a few minutes late."

"You sure about that?" He said in a joking tone. "I thought you were like, this *genius* or something. Super serious about school."

"Where'd you hear that?" She asked curiously, studying Billy's face as he grinned playfully.

"I mean, I always see you studying and reading and stuff. Plus you're friends with Nancy Wheeler."

"Are you keeping tabs on me or something?"

"I'm just observant." He winked at her.

*Stop doing that. Stop looking at me like that.*

"Well," Claire played it off, trying her best to remain confident for at least *one* conversation, "you're wrong, anyways. I may study, but I'm not a *genius*." She mocked his tone.

"Hey, there's nothing wrong with being a little nerdy." Billy put his hands up like he was being accused of something. Claire's eyes darted to the uncontrolled steering wheel, but he placed his hands back after just a second.

"I'm not nerdy!" Claire argued.

"You're not totally nerdy," Billy offered as he peeled into the school parking lot. "But you're a little nerdy." They both jolted forwards a bit as he threw the car in park. "And we've got two whole minutes left." He grinned at her.

"Thank you for the ride." She said with a hint of sarcasm. "I'm still mad at you for calling me a nerd."

"Hey, don't be like that." He leaned his elbow on the passenger seat, showcasing his bicep. "I kinda like it." He lightly took a strand of Claire's hair and twirled it around his finger, letting it drop just as slowly. "You're... different." She could feel her cheeks turning bright

pink.

She nearly jumped through the roof of the car when the first period bell rang loudly. "Time for class." Billy smirked and got out of the car abruptly. She followed, confused, rushing into the school behind him. When it came time for the two of them to part ways, Billy gave her a quick squeeze on the elbow and said, "See ya later. Claire." He stalked away from her, not looking back, and she watched him go. As much as those cheerleaders may have annoyed Claire, they were absolutely right about Billy's body. He was one attractive young man.

She scooted into class, earning a disapproving nod from the teacher. She apologized and made her way to her seat next to Nancy. Nancy was smiling not-so-innocently, looking down at her text book.

Without looking up, she muttered, "You look nice today, Claire."

Claire stifled a laugh. "Shut up."

She felt like she was floating on air all day long, smiling at random times remembering something Billy had done or said. Him twirling her hair, or when he squeezed her arm. Or one of his many winks at her.

"You in there, Claire?" Steve asked at lunch. She looked up at him in surprise.

"What?" Nancy kept her eyes on her food but smiled knowingly.

"I said, do you know what you're going to be for Halloween?" *Oops.*

"Oh, I'm sorry. Uhm, I'm not really sure yet." Steve narrowed his eyes at her.

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine." Claire smiled. Steve looked at Nancy, then back at Claire.

"Alright, guys, what's going on?"

"Yeah, Claire. What's going on?" Nancy joked. Claire sighed

reluctantly.

"Okay, Steve. So don't get mad." He immediately looked like he knew what she was about to say. "Billy gave me a ride to school this morning, and Nancy was making fun of me for it. That's it, no big deal."

"Really? Is that why you're staring off into space like a lunatic?" Nancy giggled as Claire blushed.

"I was *not*." Steve shook his head in disbelief.

"Damn... if I would have told you that I thought he was a *great* guy, would you have stayed away from the slime ball? Cause I can do that, too." Claire gave him a look.

"Steve, we're not going out. He just gave me a ride today."

"And yesterday." Nancy muttered.

"Nancy!"

"Yesterday? Why?" Steve wore a puzzled, frustrated look.

"It's a long story..."

"Give me a break." Steve glanced between both of the girls. "I'm not trying to rain on your little parade here, but seriously, this guy just... he gives me the creeps. There's something kind of... off with him."

"I don't know, Steve." Nancy argued. "From what Claire says, he actually seems like a pretty nice guy. Maybe he's just overly competitive when he plays basketball, and it makes him seem like a jerk."

"Or maybe, he's just being nice to Claire because he's trying to... you know." Steve raised his eyebrows, slightly uncomfortable with being suggestive in regards to his friend. Claire almost spit out her food.

"Oh, shut *up*, Steve." Nancy elbowed him. Claire sunk into herself for a moment, considering the possibility. What if she was just a game to him? What if he flirted with her, then ran back to his friends in the

locker room and talked about how stupid or pathetic she was? "Hey." Nancy put her hand on her friend's arm. "Don't listen to Steve. At least give him a chance. If he's a jerk, I'm sure you'll realize it."

"But he is a jerk and I'm telling both of you that right now, and you won't listen."

"I mean, you don't really know him, right?" Claire asked pointedly.

"I don't know the guy *that* well, but I'm telling you, I have a good eye for this kind of stuff."

"Like you had a 'good eye' when you were friends with those losers last year?" Nancy asked accusingly.

"I'm different now than I was last year. I've grown up."

"Well, maybe Billy has some growing up to do, too." Claire offered. Steve paused, thinking for a moment.

"Look," Steve finally said. "You do what you want to do. Just... be careful, okay?" Claire nodded. "And if he starts to act like an asshole, you tell me." Claire smiled softly.

"Thanks, Steve. But like I said, we're not even going out. I think you may be jumping the gun a little too soon."

"I'm definitely not."

"Why are you so sure?" Steve sighed, looked behind her, and nodded at something behind her. Claire turned to see Billy, leaning against a building across the courtyard, staring right at her, smiling somewhat knowingly.

"Dude hasn't taken his eyes off you since we started talking." Claire turned back to Nancy and smiled sheepishly. "And you guys wonder why he gives me the creeps."

Nancy punched him in the arm.

---

**Whatcha think?! Review review review. (: Thanks! Xoxox.**

## 6. Chapter 6

**Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or any of the characters created by the show.**

**My OC is Claire Owens.**

**You know the drill! Read, review, etc. (:**

---

Claire couldn't stop thinking about her conversation with Steve and Nancy. Was this actually happening? Her last two classes passed quickly, and she soon found herself getting dressed for track. Her knee was still taped up and was sore when it bent too much. She would be somewhat limited in practice today.

After her coach (lightly) fussed at her for injuring herself, Claire participated in as much of practice as she could. When the team split off into their individual event practices, she was told to run a few light laps by herself, and otherwise stretch out and rest her knee by the water coolers.

She was on the ground, her legs stretched out straight in front of her, grabbing the bottoms of her feet when she heard Billy clear his throat above her. She looked up, startled, and leaned back, trying to look relaxed and cool even though her cheeks were bright red and she was covered in sweat.

"Oh, hey." Claire said, flipping her ponytail back over her shoulder.

"Hello, miss Claire." Billy pronounced each syllable very carefully, eyeing her while filling his water bottle. "Knee still bothering you, I see?"

"Just a little. Coach didn't want me to hurt myself again, so I'm just taking it easy."

"You know, I never was one for 'taking it easy'", Billy drawled smoothly, smirking and crouching down beside her. "But what do I know?" Claire looked away, her face getting hotter. He paused for a

second, then continued. "Are you planning on taking it easy this weekend, too?" He asked.

"What do you mean?" Claire asked, a bit confused.

"I mean..." He spoke smoothly, finding her hair again with his fingers and giving it a playful twirl. "If you're feeling up to it, I'd like to take you out this weekend." Claire's jaw dropped a bit.

"Oh..." She was having a hard time pulling her thoughts together. This was all happening so fast.

"How about Friday night?" He pushed, gazing into her eyes. Claire took a moment to look over him. His face was also a bit blushed from his work out, his arms toned and particularly muscular-looking, shown off by his loose sleeveless t shirt. His eyes were soft, and his smile was unintimidating and genuine. His tongue briefly flicked out to graze his lower lip.

"I mean..." Claire hesitated. *It's just one date, Claire. And look at him...* "Yeah." She said finally, with a smile. "That sounds really nice." Billy's soft smile turned into a victorious grin.

"Perfect." He stood up, taking a large swig of water. He pointed down at Claire as he walked away. "I'll pick you up at seven." He jogged back over to the basketball team. Claire gazed off into space, a dumb smile on her face. She didn't see the small group of senior girls shooting her envious glares from across the football field. She didn't see Billy glance back at her, shaking his head.

She didn't see Billy give Steve a hard, triumphant slap on the back as he skipped back over to rejoin his teammates. She didn't see Steve glance knowingly back at her, concern and sadness in his eyes.

...

Claire was on the phone with Nancy as she rummaged through her closet. "Nancy, *helppppp*!" Her friend laughed at her. "I have absolutely nothing to wear."

"Why don't you wear that cute black sweater that kind of falls off your shoulders?" Nancy suggested. Claire threw a few items of

clothing to the side before she found it. *This could do.*

"With what? Jeans? Or a skirt?" Claire thought out loud. "I don't even know where he's *taking* me."

"Then wear something comfortable, but cute." Having Nancy on the phone to give Claire's crazy hyperactive mind such simple, obvious advice felt like the only thing keeping her from floating off into the night sky.

"Right..." Claire looked through one of her drawers. She pulled out a pair of faded, slightly torn jeans. She had acquired these jeans at a garage sale, then never wore them because she hadn't been into the style. She thought they were a bit trashy at the time; now she thought they were perfect. "Ohmygosh I found the *perfect* pair of jeans!"

The girls excitedly discussed how she should do her hair and make-up, and finally Claire decided she should get off the phone to start getting ready. It was nearly six o'clock.

"And Claire?" Nancy quickly added as they were ending their conversation.

"Yep?" Claire asked, mostly distracted by the various types of foundations she had snagged from her mother's bathroom.

"I'm sure everything tonight is going to go totally fine, and I bet you're going to have a blast." She began. Claire perked back up. This was the kind of sentence that started all positive, and was followed with something she wouldn't want to hear. "But..." *There it is.* "I just wanted to say, if Billy ends up being a total jerk, you know you can come over to my place for the night."

"Not you, *too!*" Claire sighed and plopped down on her bed.

"Like I said, I'm sure he's great and tonight is going to be super awesome. I just had to say it. Steve's been really weird since he found out you were going out with Billy." Claire knew this was true. Steve hadn't said anything to her explicitly about the situation, but she somehow knew not to bring Billy up around him. Nancy had been a

good friend, but Claire got the feeling that she was starting to listen to what her boyfriend was telling her.

"Look. If he's not a good person, I'm not going to like him. I won't go out with him again. I'll be fine." She thought she heard Nancy sigh slightly with relief.

"Good." There was a short, awkward pause. "Sorry, I bet you're going to have such a good time tonight! I'm excited to hear all about it!" Claire smiled. It was nice knowing that, agree or disagree, she would always have Nancy to fall back on. "Call me if you need any last-minute fashion advice!" The girls laughed together.

"Hopefully not, but I will definitely let you know." Claire glanced at the clock. "Oh, I need to start getting ready!"

"Don't do anything I wouldn't do!"

\*click\*

*Oh, goodness.*

Forty-five minutes later, she was tediously eyeing every aspect of her outfit in the mirror. Her hair was completely down and parted to the side. She had tousled the long, wavy locks and used adequate hair spray to create the perfect style that was messy, but not *too* messy. The soft, black sweater fell gently off the sides of her shoulders, and hugged her waist slightly where it ended just above the top of her jeans. The jeans were somewhat baggy on her, but she loved them. They were different... Billy's voice played over in her head, when he'd called *her* "different" in his car in the school parking lot. She could be different if she wanted to.

She had to admit to herself, though she wasn't typically the girl who spent a huge amount of time in front of the mirror looking at her own face, she felt pretty. On any other day she figured she looked fine, a comfortable if not unnoticeable kind of person. She was never *ugly*, but she didn't often feel particularly pretty. Well, she did tonight. Her soft prettiness could hardly be offset by edgy clothing and a bit of makeup. She still looked like Claire.



Her black boots just covered her ankles, and were clean and simple. She had a small clutch purse that she'd hardly ever used. Claire flipped her hair and smiled softly, somewhat timidly, in the mirror... she was ready to go. Just as she made to walk out of her room, she heard a knock at the front door. Her heart stopped completely.

She walked down the hallway into the living room just in time to see her father opening the door for Billy. The two shook hands, and to Claire's surprise Billy smiled charmingly, introduced himself and assured her parents that they wouldn't be out too late. They were just going to grab a bite to eat at a nice place in town. She was so caught off guard by his responsible demeanor she'd stopped walking towards them.

"Wow, Claire." Billy looked at her with respect and admiration. "You look stunning." She looked down and smiled girlishly, glancing up at her parents. They had both been uneasy to say the least about her going out on a date with a senior. But now, they seemed ... impressed? Or relieved? They seemed to be calmer knowing she'd be going out with the nice, polite and put-together boy standing in front of them. Perhaps they had previously been imagining someone much worse. Or maybe they judged him because of the kind of car he drove.

"Thank you." She made her way towards them again.

"You two have fun." Her mom reassuringly rubbed her back as she walked out the door. "You remember what we talked about." She whispered to her daughter discreetly while Billy's back was turned to them. Claire recalled the conversation she reluctantly had with her mother the night before. If at any time during the date she feels uncomfortable, she calls home. Her mom would come pick her up wherever she was, without questions.

Claire rolled her eyes, but nodded. Why was everyone so worried about her? Billy said his final goodbyes to Claire's parents, then took her arm and led her to the car. He opened the door for her, and they were finally off.

"So, where are we going to eat?" Claire asked as they pulled out of her driveway.

"How about the Hawkins movie theatre?" Billy asked slyly. Claire cocked her head.

"We're having dinner at a movie theatre?"

"I've got more on the schedule for tonight than just dinner." Billy laughed. "I hope you don't mind, I didn't think your parents would be very happy if I told them I was going to be sneaking their daughter into a movie tonight." Claire's stomach turned a bit at the idea of lying to her parents.

"What movie?"

"You heard of that Nightmare on Elm Street flick?" He eyed her, smirking, to read her reaction. Claire had heard a few girls on the track team talk about it. It was a scary movie, and she wasn't usually into scary movies. But she played it cool.

"Oh, yeah. I've heard of it."

"I heard it was crazy scary. You sure that's alright with you?"

"Yeah, totally." Claire didn't want to seem lame or *nerdy*.

"If you say so." Billy let his right arm lean casually against the passenger seat once again. His thumb grazed Claire's bare shoulder and she shivered, glancing at him. He met her gaze and smiled. He was just so *dreamy*. He was polite and charming, and witty and mischievous. He was unlike anyone Claire had ever met. He made her feel things she'd never felt before. He was obviously newly shaven, and she could smell a bit of cologne float across the car. He'd asked *her* out. He'd shaved and done his hair and put on cologne to go out with *her*.

They made it to the theatre and snuck around the back. Billy knew a guy that worked in the theatre who stuck a pencil in the back door so that they could get in without having to buy a ticket. They found the theatre playing the movie and picked seats, and Billy offered to go buy them some snacks. He gave her arm a sweet pinch before leaving her alone in the large darkened room. People were slowly trickling in; it appeared the previews were due to start soon. Surely enough, in

no time, previews began for various horror movies due to come out soon. Claire was immediately very aware of how alone and vulnerable she was... She should have said something when Billy asked if she was okay with watching this movie. The music in the previews alone was enough to make her feel uneasy. She tried to look away from the screen, but the jump scares still rattled her. She almost jumped out of her seat when Billy slid back into his seat.

"Woah, there." He said in a low voice. "You scare easy, Claire?" He joked softly.

"Maybe." She said. "Sometimes being scared can be fun." She shot back, trying to be cool. Billy looked impressed at her response.

"I agree." He settled in closer to her and offered her popcorn and candy.

Billy hadn't heard incorrectly about how scary this movie was. It was terrifying. And so gory. Claire cringed and jumped and tried not to cover her face. At one point during the movie, when there was just too much blood, she did pull her hands up close to her face, and in that instant, she felt Billy slink his arm around her shoulders and without hesitating she melted into his side, her eyes still on the screen. His warmth made her feel safe and at ease. Her heart had been racing uncomfortably, but now it raced in a pleasant way. Now she wondered what this could mean. Her thoughts were distracted by the slaughter that was currently taking place in the movie. The screams echoed in Claire's head, and she nuzzled closer to Billy. He tightened his grip on her, and she was thankful. She could feel his breath caressing her ear. Claire took in his sweet combined scent of mint, cologne and cigarette smoke.

As the movie seemed to be nearing the end, Billy whispered in Claire's ear. "You're cute when you're scared." She smiled, slightly embarrassed.

"I'm glad you think so."

"I know so." She glanced at up him. He looked into her eyes thoughtfully for a moment, then looked down at her lips. Claire's breath caught in her throat. She couldn't believe any of this was

happening. This kind of stuff didn't happen to girls like her. She was the likeable, nice girl next door. She wasn't the girl that got asked out by the popular cute jock seniors. They both quickly turned their attention back to the movie as the main character let out an excruciating scream, revealing that though Freddy Krueger was thought to have been defeated, he had, in fact, returned.

And the movie ended.

*Well, that was unsettling*, Claire thought. The lights began to click back on, and people started making their way out of the theatre.

"You still feel up for a quick bite?" Billy asked, stretching out next to Claire.

"My parents might worry..." She debated how long she could stay out without having them doubt that all they had done was go to dinner.

"We'll make it quick. I can't have you going home hungry." Billy smiled his charming, likeable smile. Claire thought for a moment, but couldn't keep from smiling, too.

"Okay, Billy Hargrove." She caved in.

"Ooh." Billy said as he led her out of the theatre, throwing his arm around her and pressing his face lightly into her hair. "I like it when you say my name."

They walked down the road to grab a burger at a late-night diner. They were sat in a brightly colored booth close to the front window of the restaurant. The atmosphere of the diner was much different than that of the theatre; the lights were bright, almost fluorescent, and excited teens held loud conversations and took turns running to the juke box with quarters. Claire thought she saw a couple girls from her classes pass by out front while Billy was ordering. She also thought she saw them stare at her and whisper to each other. The thought didn't linger for long as Billy reached across the table to take one of Claire's hands in his.

"So, tell me about yourself, Claire." He smiled sweetly, gazing into his eyes.

"I... well... what do you want to know?" She asked, not quite smooth enough to rattle off some interesting monologue about her previous life, current struggles and future dreams.

"Well... Let's start with the easy stuff." He drawled. His voice was deep and smooth. Claire could listen to him talk all day. "What's your favorite color?" Claire laughed.

"That's what you want to know?" She said, sweetly and jokingly.

"Favorite color tells a lot about a person." He explained, still smiling. "In fact, I bet if you gave me two chances, I could guess yours." She shook her head at him.

"You're on." He eyed her intensely. His eyes darted from her eyes, to her arms, to her purse, to her hair and anywhere else he could have possibly scanned.

"You don't usually wear black." He thought out loud. "Usually you're wearing brighter colors. This looks like it's only been worn a couple times." He tugged at her sleeve. She tried to maintain a poker face as he read her. He thought, rubbing his chin. "When I think of you, I think of warmer colors. Yellow and orange and shit."

*He's not wrong*, Claire thought as she laughed slightly at his statement.

"And you're always so positive." He cocked his head, looking into her eyes. "All smiles and sunshine. I bet you like the spring time, don't you, Claire?" She tried not to give anything away with her expression, but he was on point. "You're definitely a bright color kinda girl. It's gotta be a spring color, or, just... you know, a *happy* color. I'm gonna go with..." he paused for a few moments. "Yellow." Claire smiled with amusement.

"I'm impressed." She responded.

"What can I say?" He leaned back, putting his hands behind his head in triumph. Claire couldn't help but glance down as his shirt pulled up a bit, exposing his moderately defined abs. "I know how to read people. And I didn't even have to use my second chance."

The food came and they continued their conversation. Billy was

charming and smooth, and Claire began to feel more and more comfortable around him. His sense of humor was sexy and witty, but not overly intimidating. Claire's face was almost sore by the end of their dinner, just from smiling. He joked with her and picked on her, but also complimented her and paid respect to her looks, intelligence and grace.

"You wanna know why I like you so much?" Billy asked, licking his lips and staring softly into Claire's eyes.

"Why, Billy?" She humored him, but was excited to hear his response.

"You're just so different." He sighed, looking out the window to a large group of girls across the street. Claire followed his gaze. Admittedly, most of them were dressed similarly. They all talked the same, in high-pitched excited voices, fake-laughing. "So many girls in high school, they do what they do to be like everyone else. But you... you do what makes you happy. And you're smart and you're not ashamed of it." This time it was Claire staring intensely at Billy, while he still stared off into space. She took in his jawline, and the sincerity of his voice. She noticed how neat his hair was tonight, and the way his shirt buttons were slightly loosened, revealing his chest ever so subtly. The look in his eyes was far away, his words meaning something deeper. "I admire you." He admitted, interrupting Claire's thoughts.

"Me?" She asked, reflexively, taken aback.

"Yeah, you." He replied. "You're talented and smart."

"So are you." Billy scoffed.

"I'm a smartass." Claire chuckled.

"Smart, nonetheless." Billy finally looked back at her, smiling softly, accepting the compliment.

"Well it means a lot that you think so." They locked eyes for a few more moments before Billy noticed the time. "Well, I'd better get you home before your parents come looking for you." Claire agreed. They had made dinner quick, but she may still have to do some convincing

to make her parents believe that was all they'd done tonight.

Soon, they were on her street, Billy seemed to be going slower than usual. He pulled off the road just a block away from her neighborhood. Claire looked at him questioningly.

"Look, I just wanted to say this before I was sitting in your driveway with your parents staring me down from the windows." Billy smirked. Claire knew that her parents' spying on them from inside was a strong possibility, so she just nodded. "I really like you, and..." His arm was around the back of the passenger seat once again, but this time, he seemed to be moving a bit closer to her. Claire's heart started to race... she did *not* feel ready for this. But goodness, did she want to kiss him. She was frozen for a moment, but felt herself leaning in anyways. "Would you go out with me again?" He asked when their faces were just inches apart. Claire nodded, her eyes locked on his lips, hypnotized.

He smirked, and whispered softly, "Good." He closed the gap between them and kissed her. He was gentle, slow, and delicate. Claire drifted happily into this feeling, savoring the taste and smell of him. He lightly brushed her chin with his thumb, and she shivered. Finally, he pulled away from her, gazing from her lips to her eyes. She was completely speechless, not sure what to do or what to say. He ran his hand along the side of her face, paused another moment, smiled and said, "Now let's get you home." He turned back to the steering wheel and then they were in front of her house.

Claire still wasn't sure what to say, but couldn't stop smiling. "Good night, Billy." He reached out and gave her hand a squeeze as she exited the car.

"Good night, beautiful." Claire could have fainted right then and there. *Beautiful*. When was the last time she was called beautiful by someone other than her mother?

The walk to her room was excruciating. She hadn't wanted the night to end; she wanted to stay with Billy, breathe him in, have him guess something else about her. Listen to him talk about her. She wanted to know more about him- everything about him.

She fell asleep thinking about him- he paid her visits in her dreams, though not in the way that she expected.

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**Please please review! Whoever leaves the most thoughtful review will be featured in the next chapter with a response. Thanks so much! So happy with all the attention this story is getting. (:**



## 7. Chapter 7

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or any of the characters created by the show.

My OC is Claire Owens.

Sorry I'm not updating too often! I have every intention, however, of finishing this story. So PLEASE read, enjoy and review. (:

Special shout out to starlight-x-A-x and TraptWolf94 for your awesome comments! starlight, I appreciate your feedback on that crushing stage! I \*love\* writing that part of the story, and I try to not be too repetitive so I'm glad you're enjoying it! And TraptWolf, you called it. Not so happy Steve, but... you know. He never would have been happy with Billy being close to Claire.

ONE MORE THING before I let you read actual story... As I was looking at my timeline, and the time I have left before the Stranger Things events begin to take place around Halloween time, I realized that it's going to seem like Claire falls for Billy kind of so quickly that it seems unrealistic and she seems a bit naïve. I will address this in two ways: (1) If I'd had the time, I would have loved to give her a few more months to fall for him before he began to show his true colors. But, I wanted to start them in the Fall and there are simply not enough months in between August and October. (2) As I've alluded to, this is Claire's first relationship so it's very possible that she would have fallen without thinkin *very* quickly, and would get attached beyond reason.

If there are any comments or concerns regarding *that*, I'd love to hear them! Otherwise continue to comment and read and subscribe and stuff! You are all super awesome and appreciated. (:

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*"Claire?" Billy was just out of reach of Claire, his arms outstretched,*

*trying to grasp her fingers but they wouldn't touch.*

*"Billy!" She shouted, knowing for some reason that she had to get to him. Something was wrong, and she knew she had to help him.*

*"Claire, come back!" He shouted desperately as she began drifting backwards, away from him. The ground below her felt like quicksand; she couldn't get enough traction to push herself towards him. It was like she was trying to walk uphill through a mudslide, but nonetheless, she put all her effort into moving forwards anyways.*

*"Billy, come closer to me! I can't reach you!" Tears slipped down her cheeks as she realized she was failing him when he was in danger. A loud screeching sound came from behind him, and he whipped around. Out of the ground popped a large, menacing hand with razors attached. It reached towards Billy, clawing for him.*

*"Please, Claire!" He turned to her, pleading for her to save him. The horrendous blade-covered hand reached further towards the boy, exposing the arm of a man, but the entire man wouldn't need to show before it reached Billy. He was now centimeters away.*

*"Billy, NO! RUN!" She screamed, pulling on the ground herself to attempt to gain momentum but it was no use. The hand placed its grip on Billy's ankle, and he yelled in agony. "BILLY!" Claire hollered one last time, making eye contact with Billy as he was pulled to the ground, and then into the floor. It was deadly silent, and out of the bare hole in the ground sputtered blood. Claire collapsed, defeated, horrified...*

...

By the time Monday came, Claire was still shaking off the odd feeling in her stomach she'd been plagued with after the nightmare on Friday. Billy hadn't called, which was not only putting her on edge because she had hoped he would, but because some part of her was worried about him. She just wanted to see him, alive and well. Normal. She had tried to call Nancy on Saturday to talk about the date, her dream, and everything, per usual. But Nancy wasn't home, and didn't return her calls, which was definitely odd. Claire had just tried to focus on her school work and spending time with her parents, though she knew her mind seemed like it was elsewhere. She had to

admit that it was, though. Her thoughts couldn't help but wander to that sweet, charismatic man with curly hair, ear piercings, tight jeans and a smile that could kill.

Nancy planned to ride her bike to school since her knee was all healed up, but as she rolled it off her porch, she heard a familiar engine rev down the road, and soon Billy was in her drive way. A surprised and relieved smile tugged at Claire's lips as she froze, taking in the sight of the mischievous boy leaning his elbow out of the driver's window, motioning with a nod for her to get in the car. She agreed excitedly, laying her bike against the side of the house as she strode to the car. She tossed her bag in the passenger seat floor and stepped in, looking at Billy expectantly. He drove the car forward out of the driveway without a word, and just as Claire was going to ask what he was thinking, or why he didn't call, he stopped the vehicle in the middle of the rode, turned to her, and kissed her. She melted at the feeling of his fingers on her chin and his lips on hers, and she couldn't help but wear a stupid giddy grin as he pulled away from her and began to drive again.

With his eyes on the road as he smirked, he said only, "Good morning, Claire." She stayed silent, still too shocked to speak, and he knew the effect he had on her.

...

So,, that was it. No more wondering or having to ask where they stood- Claire was dating Billy. He didn't hide his affection for her, typically keeping his arm slumped casually over her shoulders, or his hand on her back as they walked through the halls together. The quick progression of their relationship excited Claire. Never in a million years could she have imagined a catch like Billy, athletic and *popular* and attractive, taking to her so quickly and easily. As she told him that during lunch that first week, he just chuckled and brushed his thumb down her cheek sweetly.

"As soon as I saw you, I knew I had to go after you. And after I got to know you, I just knew I had to act fast. Girls like you don't come around too often." It seemed that he said things like this to her, *all* the time. She was constantly suppressing butterflies from his last compliment, then just as they simmered he would toss another

smooth comment at her that made her blush and started the process all over again. He was certainly a smooth talker, but now that they were going steady, she rarely saw him giving attention to other girls at all, even when they approached him. It seemed that everything was going as perfectly as Claire could have ever imagined.

Despite Claire's undeniable enthusiasm, the couple didn't spend every possible second together. He drove her to school most days, and had lunch together sometimes but Billy seemed to insist that she still make time to see Nancy and stay on top of her grades. Though, Nancy had been acting a bit distant lately, and studying was definitely not as successful when Claire tried to focus on classwork in the same room as Billy. They had attempted only a couple of "study sessions" before Claire realized it would only ever end up in a make-out session. But goodness, did she enjoy kissing him. He was so tender, and sweet and she loved the way he smelled, and how crazy he went for her. But, as much as she liked kissing him in his car and sneaking him into her room, the both of them realized she'd have to make time to study without him. That meant either alone, one room away from her parents, or with Nancy.

Then one day that Nancy and Claire had planned to work on homework during free period, Nancy just hadn't come to school. Claire was so worried when she didn't see her in their first class, she hunted Steve down at lunch to make sure her friend was okay. She was sure Nancy would have called her if she was sick or had something come up.

"Honestly, don't tell her I told you, but she's been a little down lately." Steve admitted.

"Why? Is everything okay?" Claire prodded.

"Yeah, she's just... dealing with some stuff."

"Like what?" Claire paused, then asked cautiously. "Are you two... doing okay?" Steve looked a bit taken aback at the insinuation.

"No no no, *we're* fine. We're *great*, actually." He shot back defensively, then took a breath, ran his fingers through his hair and continued calmly. With that response, Claire wanted to ask more, but she

dropped it as he kept talking. "She's been a little off lately because one of her friends went missing just about a year ago." He said softly. Claire's eyes widened.

"Oh, I'm so sorry." Her head immediately began to turn with nice things she could do to try to make Nancy feel better, but in that situation, what really is there to do?

"Don't tell her I told you, okay? But the anniversary of Barb's death-" He said accidentally, quickly realizing his mistake and correcting himself. "I mean, disappearance... Is coming up in a little over a month." Sadness washed over his eyes and Claire felt guilty for making him talk about it. She reached her hand out, rubbing it gently down his arm.

"I'm sorry, and I hope both of you are okay." She said sincerely. He down at Claire, patting her hand appreciatively and giving it a small squeeze before turning back to his locker.

"Thank you." He muttered under his breath, composing himself. "So, uh... how are things going with Billy?" Steve tried to ask casually as he picked through his locker. It had been about three weeks since Claire and Billy had shown up to school together that one morning, and Steve hadn't brought it up much besides making a few sarcastic comments at lunch. He seemed to be trying to be respectful of the pair, while also not totally approving. Claire smile softly at his efforts.

"We're doing really well, actually." She said, trying her best to sound assuring. Steve's eyes snapped to hers.

"Really?" He asked.

"*Really*, Steve. He's sweet, and funny and I *really* like him." Steve inspected her features for doubt, or something that could indicate anything other than what she was saying was true.

"Well... I still think the guy's a jerk, but..." He sighed, closing his locker. "I'm glad you're happy, and if anything changes..."

"I know, I know. You'll be the first to know about it." Claire smiled.

"Atta girl." He smiled, delivering a soft, playful punch to her shoulder. "I've got some last-minute homework to do before my next class. I'll catch ya later, Claire."

Claire went to her own locker to change out some books, then walked around for a bit looking for Billy. Surprised to not see him, she thought maybe he'd decided to get a work-out or basketball practice in before his next class. Not too worried, she found a clear table in the sun outside and pulled out some notes to study while she ate her lunch. Light seemed to glint off the yellow bow that loosely held her hair back behind her neck. She took a relaxing breath, enjoying the weather, perfectly happy.

Totally unaware of the fact that her boyfriend was on the other side of the school, wildly punching dents into the dumpster while imagining it was Steve Harrington.

...

Claire saw Billy for the first time all day that afternoon at practice. She was running her warm-up laps when she saw the basketball team doing some conditioning drills with cones on the football field in the center. When the track team was taking a water break, she'd tried to make eye contact with him to send him a wave or a smile, but his attention remained focused on his drills.

As her own practice continued, she became distracted, wondering why it seemed like Billy refused to look at her. They didn't blow off practices to flirt at the water cooler or anything, but their usual exchange of glances was always something Claire looked forward to. On any other day, she would often look up after a particularly successful hurdle run to see him staring at her admirably, and it would give her goosebumps. Something just felt weird, and *off* about this afternoon, but *why*?

She was consumed by her thoughts as she ran a few sprints with her teammates, then split off to practice her hurdle. As she lined up to begin, going up against the girl who typically achieved the best time on the team, she finally caught Billy's eyes, and her stomach dropped.

Finally, he looked at her. His eyes were exactly on hers, as he ran his

hand through his hair, obviously flexing, smiling flirtatiously- while talking to one of the cheerleaders.

His stare tore away from Claire's, and she felt a stab of pain in her chest, and he smiled *that* smile, the smile that was usually for *her* at the girl in front of him instead. His actions were deliberate, and though Claire tried to rationalize them, it was too obvious what he was doing. Billy moved closer to the girl and pinched her elbow, sending another jolt of pain through Claire as she remembered how he'd pinched *her* elbow the first time he'd given her a ride to school. He was putting on a show for her, trying to hurt her, and she just wondered desperately what she'd done to deserve this. He cocked his head at the cheerleader, seeming way too amused at what she was saying to him, and that was when the whistle blew for Claire to take off.

She jumped, and her start was distracted, and late, and she knew that hesitation alone would add a good second and a half to her time. She took off, unfocused, unenthusiastic, feeling heavier than she'd ever felt before. Feeling hurt, and confused. As she approached the first hurdle, she tried to focus her energy on just getting over the top. But it seemed like she'd lost her energy- the light that usually motivated her, threw her forwards tirelessly at a sport she didn't excel at, it seemed dim. She didn't know why she was doing this anymore.

She barely made it over the first hurdle, her back foot clipping the bar. She only barely caught herself as she landed, then tried to prepare for the next one. But it was really no use. She'd already lost the race and her time was already a record low. And Billy was using *that* smile on someone else. She contemplated completing the hurdles, but hesitated too much as she approached the second, and realizing that she wouldn't make it over she tried to slow down to stop, which resulted in her stumbling into the hurdle, taking the bar to the gut, clumsily trying to catch herself. She froze, knowing how loud the hurdle on the concrete had been and how many eyes must be on her. She fixed the hurdle, tried to regain her breath and kept her eyes on the ground.

"You okay, Claire?" Her teammate who had been timing her shouted from the finish line. Claire looked up at her, nodding, then immediately glanced back to Billy. He was no longer smiling, and the

cheerleader was gone. Emotions flickered across his face so rapidly that Claire had a hard time reading them. Anger? Sadness? Regret? Surprise? She pulled her gaze away from him, too upset and frazzled to take the time to decipher his reaction. Tears threatened to fall as she limped awkwardly to the start line, shaking.

"I'm sorry, I just need a minute. I wasn't ready." She said quietly to the other hurdlers who were preparing to line up, looking at her with confusion. She took a few deep breaths to steady herself, trying to shake off the darkness creeping over her. This feeling was one that she was completely unfamiliar with. She'd never had feelings for anyone like she had for Billy, and now the idea of him acting this way towards her was too much for her to bear. Just a while ago, she'd thought her life was so perfect. How could she be so stupid?

"Are you sure you're okay?" One of Claire's closest teammates walked over to her, speaking softly and subtly as if to communicate that she could be trusted.

"I just don't feel well, I'll be fine." Claire said softly and shortly. It was unlike Claire to avoid eye contact, or any human contact. It was unlike her to be so short, and definitely unlike her to be upset. Ever. She was always positive, always smiling... but not now. Claire tried to smile at her friend, but it was half-hearted. She tried to think of positive things to prepare for her next run, but by the time it was her turn again, she just shook her head.

"I... don't think I can do this today." She said, feeling defeated, looking at the ground. The coach wasn't there today, but instead the head captain of the team was running practice. Realizing how strange this behavior was from Claire, she decided to cut her some slack.

"Just give me a couple more quick laps, stretch out and you can help keep time for the others." She instructed. Claire nodded, jogging to the track and keeping her eyes far from the basketball team as she ran another mile and a half, though her laps were certainly not quick. She just wanted to make it through the next couple of hours until she got home. Then, she could sob into her pillow all she wanted.

She went through the motions, doing what was asked of her, and she stayed late after practice to help clean up equipment out of guilt for



not participating. A few of her teammates asked if she was okay, and mentioned that if she needed anything to let them know. She shrugged the sympathy off numbly, and though she wondered slightly how she was going to get home that afternoon, she didn't really care. She would walk if she needed- did it really matter how long it would take her?

She didn't bother to shower or change after practice, leaving from the field to walk through the parking lot and out onto the main road.

"Hey, Claire!" She looked up lazily as Steve yelled at her from his car a few rows over. "Need a ride?" She opened her mouth to answer before jumping at the feeling of an arm wrapping around her shoulders, gripping her and pulling her close to a warm body. She looked at Billy in confusion, already feeling like she might cry again. She looked from Billy to Steve, who also seemed unsure of the gesture, so much so that he closed the door to his car and made to walk towards them.

"I've got *my* girl, Harrington. Why don't you go worry about yours?" Billy shouted at him, pulling Claire towards his car. Her feet moved in the direction that he guided her, and she was completely unsure of what to do. He took her backpack for her, opening her door for her and placing her bag in the backseat. With him hovering just inches behind her, waiting to shut the door behind her, she felt pressured to step in and wondered what this meant.

As they pulled out of the lot, Claire thought she heard Steve calling out to her. It reminded her of one of her first dreams of Billy- the thought made her shiver. She thought back to that feeling- how Billy had laughed, and how worried and sad her closest friends and family were...

"Claire?!" Billy snapped his fingers in her face. She jumped, looking at him in a daze. "You deaf now?" He asked rudely.

"What?" She asked.

"I was *saying* that you don't need to be taking rides from Harrington." She blinked a few times, contemplating what to say.

"What is your *problem*?" She almost immediately regretted her words as he pulled off the road, slammed the breaks and turned to her.

"My problem?" He asked seriously. Claire was suddenly aware of how utterly alone they were. He had driven down a backroad already, which wasn't the way to her house- a fact she was too distracted to notice a few moments ago. There were no houses nearby, and no other cars. No kids on bikes. Nobody but the two of them. "What's *your* problem?!"

"Y-you..." Claire stuttered, much less confident than she'd been when she originally imagined where this conversation may go. "You were with that other girl, and I..."

"So it's okay for you to put your hands all over other guys, but I can't have a conversation with another girl?"

"What guys?" Claire asked quietly. The only other guy she'd ever really talked to at school was...

"Harrington. I *saw* you at his locker. Don't. LIE." Billy's voice got louder and he leaned closer to Claire. She instinctively leaned towards the door, becoming more and more afraid by the second. Who was this person, who was *so* unlike the amazing, sweet gentle man she'd come to know over the last month? He'd *never* acted like this before.

"Billy, I swear, there is *nothing* going on between me and Steve." She responded quickly and nervously. "He's just my friend, and he was upset... You were *flirting* with another gir-"

"What was he so upset about, huh?" Billy spat back, challenging her and disregarding what he'd done.

"Just... some stuff going on with Nancy."

"Oh, come *on*, Claire! That's the oldest trick in the book! Guy runs to you with girlfriend problems, asks for your comfort then next thing you know-"

"It's not like that..." Claire cut him off. "*She's* my friend, too. I would never-"

"Just because *you* wouldn't doesn't mean *he* wouldn't, and that little prick has been all pissed cause I kick his ass every day at practice-"

"Billy, we're JUST FRIENDS." Claire pleaded for him to listen to her, unsure of why she felt the need to defend herself to him. But she did-she wanted her boyfriend back. She just needed him to calm down long enough to where she could bring him back. Billy just stared at her; his eyes were squinted as he inspected her, reading her expressions. A few moments went by in silence, and finally, he sighed, reaching his hand out to Claire's face. At the motion, Claire reflexively flinched away, and Billy's expression changed to one of hurt.

"I'm sorry..." He whispered. "I'm sorry, Claire, I'm such an asshole." She felt tears forming in her eyes again as she felt pity for the boy in front of her as he crumpled at the realization that she was afraid of his touch. "I just... I thought you were..."

"It's okay." She reached out and took his hand, pressing it to the side of her face. "Billy... I would *never*-"

"I know." He said simply, nodding, brushing her cheek. "And Claire?" He asked as he pulled her closer to him and gazed into her eyes seriously. "I would *never* hurt you."

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**Don't hate me. I had to do it. Oh and please drop me a comment! I love them! And I really keep track of them as considerations while I write. You're awesome!**